

THE ARTIALISATION OF ROMAN LANDSCAPE IN THE ELITE VILLA

ZARMAKOUPÍ (M.) *Shaping Roman Landscape. Ecocritical Approaches to Architecture and Wall Painting in Early Imperial Italy.* Pp. 208, b/w & colour maps, b/w & colour pls. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2023. Cased, US\$65. ISBN: 978-1-60606-848-9.
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Z.'s highly visual work brings a fresh ecocritical perspective to the study of Roman landscape and architecture. Contributing to a growing number of studies in this field, Z. challenges traditional analyses that focus solely on the accuracy of landscape representations in villa art and seeks to emphasise the purposeful and orchestrated relationship between (elite landowning) Romans and their surroundings in the early imperial period. The 208-page book contains 78 colour and 8 black-and-white plates, as well as 24 maps and plans, which offer readers the opportunity to engage with, and be immersed in, the villas and the art that form the basis of her discussion.

Focusing on ancient Roman luxury countryside villas as 'incubators of ideas about landscape' (p. 144), Z. provides a comprehensive analysis of villa environments from the early imperial period, using literary, archaeological and pictorial remains, to improve our understanding of the relationship between *natura* and *artifex*. To address the interconnected environmental, aesthetic, social and political changes that shaped the concept of landscape as a historically determined mode of perception in this period, Z. employs A. Roger's concept of 'artialisation' (*Court traité du paysage* [1997]), which is taken as the overarching model against which to analyse the material evidence.

Artialisation is the human-only initiated process whereby land (or nature) becomes landscape (or 'LandArt', as Roger describes it). This transformation occurs as nature *in situ* is shaped by gardeners, landscapers and architects, and as nature is created *in visu* through art and literature, thus indirectly influencing collective perception (p. 19).

Using this model, Z. posits that elite Romans saw themselves as interconnected with landscape, perceiving it as an extension of themselves. The process of transforming nature *in situ* into nature *in visu* via architectural and decorative styles in villas thus deliberately blurred the line between reality and fantastical depiction (pp. 18–19) and created an ideal of Roman 'landscape', which was appropriately deployed, and often framed, within the overall decor or decorum of villa environments.

In the opening chapter Z. critiques the separation of landscape and architectural development in current debates, advocating for their intertwined examination. This is fitting, for, as Z. demonstrates, landscape and architecture evolved together, and one informed the development of the other during the Roman period. Z.'s focus on the late Republican and early imperial periods provides a detailed examination of elite contexts, though the trickle-down effect of these practices to lower social strata is unexplored and would benefit from further study.

Chapter 2 provides a thorough summary of debates regarding the integration of Hellenistic architecture into Rome during the second and first centuries BCE as well as into garden space and art (the latter being thoroughly addressed in Chapter 5). Using a wealth of colour plates, plans and maps, Z. effectively synthesises existing scholarship on Hellenistic influences on landscape, with a specific interest in its presence in the public buildings of Rome and the maritime villas gaining precedence along the coasts of Latium and Campania. For example, her discussion of 'colonial' botanic gardens, where conquered

plants symbolise Rome's process of artilisation and territorial dominance (pp. 36–7), is well-presented in the figures provided (which she refers back to throughout the book), and Livia's garden, often-referenced in landscape and garden studies, benefits from an in-depth analysis from an architectural and perspectival viewpoint. Using visual aids, she effectively illustrates how the Roman elite employed these elements to assert their cultural inheritance from Hellenistic traditions and their dominion over nature (p. 39).

In Chapter 3 the discussion shifts to the relationship between personal nature and external nature, as articulated by Vitruvius. Z. delves into Vitruvius' principles of *firmitas*, *utilitas* and *venustas*, emphasising how these ensured a building's harmony with its environment (p. 51). Although the chapter rehashes some familiar ground, it highlights how Roman domestic architecture mediated the relationship between inside and outside spaces, furthering the process of artilisation through design and seasonal functionality (p. 68).

Chapter 4 examines sacral-idyllic and villa landscapes, noting the overwhelming presence of human-made elements within natural surroundings. Z.'s use of archaeological data to compare landscape paintings with actual landscapes is particularly compelling. She argues that these paintings not only reflected but also shaped the Roman collective gaze, embedding maritime villas within idealised landscapes and emphasising their political and social significance (e.g. pp. 89, 98).

In Chapter 5 Z. situates her analysis within contemporary discussions of perspective and sensory perception. She explores how villa landscapes and garden simulacra revealed Roman conceptualisations of nature and their empire's territorial control. This chapter underscores the movement from visual perception to contemplation, enriching the historical context of these artistic representations (pp. 104, 109).

Chapter 6 concludes with a discussion on the appropriate use of architectural and landscape paintings within different types of rooms, highlighting Vitruvius' aesthetic considerations. The chapter suggests that closed rooms were suited for architectural paintings, while open rooms were better for landscape depictions (p. 135).

Z. also explores how art transforms into a means for villa owners to control the narrative of their estates. By utilising current ecocritical approaches to art and architecture, she conceptualises art beyond genre aesthetics, using it to articulate concerns about human environmental impact. This innovative approach further underscores the significance of her contribution to the field.

Integrating the discussion of 'invisible' slave labour throughout the book, rather than relegating it to a separate concluding section, would have enriched the narrative. This approach would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of how slave labour significantly shaped the lived experience of Roman landscape, adding depth to the analysis and highlighting the integral role of slaves in the creation and maintenance of these environments. Additionally, the book would have benefited from a glossary of terms and translations of the Latin in the text, particularly for the benefit of non-specialist audiences aiming to familiarise themselves with landscape theory in antiquity.

Z.'s work is distinguished by its excellent use of diagrams and maps, which are frequently used to great effect throughout the discussion. The bibliography is extensive and wide-reaching and an excellent resource for students and scholars alike. Despite the extensive existing scholarship on domestic art, the volume offers a fresh perspective by situating landscape paintings within their historical and archaeological contexts. This thorough and interdisciplinary approach makes the study a most valuable, and indeed vibrant, contribution to the scholarship on Roman landscape and architecture.

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